

## HIS MOST TROUBLESOME PUPIL.

BY MRS. A. E. CHITTENDEN.



NUMBERS of the pupils who attended Woodville Academy were gathered about the school-house door in a state of unusual excitement; for the collegiate department was to have a new teacher this session, the

first change that had been made in five years.

"I've seen him," said Sissy Ruth, a tall fair girl of sixteen or thereabouts.

"Have you? Where? What's he like?" asked half a dozen voices.

"Well," returned Sissy, "you know he's boarding at Squire Willis's. I ran in to see Fleda last evening, and he was walking in the garden with the squire. He doesn't look a day older than Tom Strong, and not nearly so stout."

"He must be older, though," remarked the aforesaid "Tom," decidedly; "'cause he's all through college, and I'm not near ready."

"Oh, well, Tom," returned Sissy, with a coquettish backward glance at the youth, whose manly proportions increased with much greater rapidity than his intellect, "perhaps he's clever. Hush!" she added, quickly, "there he comes, now."

"Is Fleda with him?" asked Tom, with interest, coming to look over Sissy's shoulder.

"No; and I know one thing: I wish Fleda Willis would never come to this school again; she makes more trouble than all the rest of us put together."

The girls and boys parted to make way for the teacher, who entered at that moment.

With a pleasant "good-morning," he stepped to the desk, looked at his watch, and asked one of the boys to ring the bell.

The scholars were soon arranged, the girls on one side of the room, the boys on the other, and all taking every opportunity to steal glances at the new master. What they saw was a well-made, handsome-looking young fellow, with dark-gray eyes, to which his pale-golden hair gave a peculiar brilliancy.

The clock had just struck ten, the newly formed classes were fairly under way, when the door opened, and a young girl entered the room. She was small and very slender, with a pretty

piquant face, and long braids of wavy dark hair that fell far below her waist. The braids were tied with scarlet ribbons, but otherwise she was dressed like a little Quakeress, in softest gray.

She walked slowly across the room, and, placing her hand on the back of the chair Sissy Ruth occupied, said composedly:

"You have taken my desk, Sissy; give it to me."

Sissy looked doubtfully at the master and half rose.

"You may keep your place, Miss Ruth," he said. "Miss Willis, you are very late—how does it happen?"

The girl turned her wide brown eyes toward him.

"Oh," she answered, carelessly, "I hardly ever come to school earlier than this. But I must have my desk; it's the one I always use."

Mr. Rutledge raised his eyebrows, and his lips took a new curve.

"For to-day," he said, "you may take the vacant desk at the end of the line; and hereafter please remember that school opens at nine o'clock. I desire all the scholars to be here punctually at that time. The geometry class will now recite."

Fleda's cheeks grew scarlet, and her eyes flashed. The girls smiled, and the boys looked daggers at the master.

Fleda stood irresolute for a minute; then, with a defiant glance around, took the place assigned her.

"I say, Fleda, you had to give in for once in your life; didn't you?" asked Sissy, with a laugh, as they were walking home from school.

A quick flush dyed Fleda's cheeks, but she answered carelessly:

"It wasn't worth making a fuss about. Of course, I'll have my own desk after this."

"Going to be in time for school to-morrow?" asked Tom, who was carrying Fleda's book.

"Not unless I choose. The idea!" with a scornful little laugh. "'I desire all the scholars.' It was really amusing. We will have to get him out of the school—I don't like him."

"Oh, Fleda!" exclaimed Sissy, "I do! Just think: father says he has ever so much money, but prefers teaching to being idle. I think it's splendid."

"Yes, he looks that sort," returned Fleda, contemptuously. "Pedantic and conceited, as if he expected to rule the universe. I wouldn't dream of enduring it." And, with a nod and smile of good-bye, she turned to enter the pretty place she called home.

"You didn't to-day — eh, Fleda?" called Sissy, maliciously.

Without deigning any answer, Fleda ran up the broad gravel path, the veranda steps, and almost against Mr. Rutledge, who was standing in the shadow of the rose-trellis.

"I beg pardon!" he said, courteously stepping aside to allow her to pass, and with difficulty suppressing a smile of amusement at her evident confusion.

Had he heard the conversation by the gate? Fleda wondered. But, of course, he had; it was only a short distance from the house, and they had spoken anything but softly.

"Well, I don't care," she thought, "perhaps he'll be warned." She looked up. The gray eyes were regarding her steadily.

"Miss Willis," said their owner, quietly, "allow me to detain you a moment. I wish to say, with regard to the school-desk you prefer, that, if Miss Ruth does not object to giving it up to you, I am willing you should have it."

"Indeed!" returned Fleda, sarcastically. "You're extremely kind!"

"Giving in already," she thought, triumphantly, as she passed him and entered the house. "And yet he has a way—yes, I know 'twill be battle royal between us; and"—with an emphatic nod of her pretty head—"we'll see who'll be victorious."

A month had passed away. The school-room was very quiet. Class after class was called, recited, and returned to their places in rapid order. The pupils knew they had found their master, and obedience was promptly and willingly given.

There was only one vacant place; Fleda was tardy as usual. Her defiance of the master had not, as yet, been very openly expressed. Being naturally bright, and loving study for its own sake, she did not annoy by imperfect recitations. The want of respect in her manner when addressing him, Mr. Rutledge thought best to overlook; but he determined that the deliberate and continued disobedience of coming to school after hours should end.

To-day it was even later than usual when she entered the room. With her accustomed careless grace, she was moving toward her seat when Mr. Rutledge spoke:

"Miss Willis! you may come to the desk."

"Did you speak to me, Mr. Rutledge?" asked Fleda, an indescribable impertinence in tone and manner.

"Yes; I desired you to come to the desk."

"Oh!" She assumed an utterly indifferent expression, and, walking to the master's desk, stood leaning slightly against it, and, taking some rosebuds from her belt, commenced arranging them more to her satisfaction. The girl's audacity was perfect.

In spite of his exasperation, a gleam of amusement shone in the master's dark eyes.

"Miss Willis," he said, "have you an excuse for being late again to-day? If so, you may give it to me."

"Really, Mr. Rutledge," she returned, with a little mocking smile, "I cannot oblige you, as I have nothing of the kind." She turned to go.

"Stop!" said Mr. Rutledge, rather sternly. "Again and again, you have come to school after hours. The first day of the session, I particularly requested all the scholars to be punctual. The rest have obeyed me. I see no reason why an exception to the rules should be made in your favor; I can allow it no longer. If you be late to-morrow, I cannot consider it otherwise than willful disobedience; and you will be obliged to make up after school the time lost in the morning. You may go to your seat."

He had spoken quietly, albeit rather sternly; but, if his little speech had been an earthquake, it could hardly have produced a greater sensation. For a moment, there was breathless silence. Fleda had not once lowered her eyes, but, with a painful effort, gazed steadily into the master's face. The color had rushed into her cheeks, and then receded, leaving her very white. To her indignation and dismay, she felt the hot tears coming, and bit her lip fiercely to keep them back.

A feeling very much akin to pity crept into Paul Rutledge's heart as he looked into the proud colorless little face.

"You may go to your seat," he repeated, more gently.

Fleda longed to speak, but, knowing if she did she would undergo the everlasting humiliation of bursting into tears, she obeyed, but with her head still held defiantly erect.

What a long day that seemed! To Fleda's extreme annoyance, her recitations were not so perfect as usual. What if anyone should think she was excited or confused?

After school, she walked home the centre of a gay group as usual; but, once in her own room, she threw herself on the bed in a passion of tears.

"I hate him! I hate him!" she sobbed. "I don't care for what he says! I do not care!"

One might have asked, that being the case, why these tears?

"Scolding me before the school! If I'd answered him—if I'd said something. Oh!" springing up and stamping her little foot, "to think of his being in this very house! How can I endure his hateful presence this long winter? Obey him? Not for the world would I be in time to-morrow."

Paul walked to school the next morning with a heavy heart. He had delayed to the last minute, hoping against hope that he might see Fleda starting before him. He had seen her flitting about the garden as he left the house, and almost turned back to beg her to accompany him; then laughed at himself for the folly of the thought.

It was rather a bitter laugh, though. He was as unused to opposition as Fleda herself. Wealthy, handsome, and clever, he had always won his way easily enough; and this little village-girl's willfulness troubled him more than he would have cared to confess.

The bell rang and school began. Paul glanced toward a certain desk; indeed, every pair of eyes in the room, blue, black, brown, or gray, was directed toward the same vacant chair.

Paul's heart sank, and an ominous frown took up its abode between his eyes.

Fleda was not there.

A little after eleven, she entered the room. She had donned a white gown; in her belt were fastened some scarlet geraniums, which matched the vivid flush, caused by excitement, that burned on either cheek; her eyes shone like twin stars.

One would hardly have thought it could be in the heart of man to be angry with so fair a vision; yet Paul Rutledge was angry—very angry.

"Miss Willis," he said, his tone unusually low and constrained, "have you an excuse for this tardiness?"

"No." Her voice trembled slightly, in spite of her utmost effort to control it, as she uttered the one little word.

"It is now eleven o'clock," Paul said, still in the same low tone. "Do not forget that you remain two hours after school to-day. Williams, you may continue your recitation."

The hands of the clock almost pointed to three. Fleda waited with wildly-beating heart. She was afraid to disobey the command that had been so quietly spoken. She stole a glance at the man she "hated." How handsome he was! How cool and decided his manner: how all but she obeyed his slightest word or look.

"He's different from anyone I ever saw,"

thought Fleda, pressing her cold hands against her burning cheeks; "there could not be two such—such disagreeable people. I wish—wish—of course I wish I had never seen him. I'm nearly seventeen, and I will not stay after school!"

One—two—three, clanged out the old clock. Fleda rose with the rest. She felt a hand laid lightly on her arm, as a low voice murmured:

"You will not leave the room."

Her highly-strung nerves thrilled at the touch and tone. She stood for a moment as if spell-bound, and—could it be she had almost yielded? Was this her victory?

"I will!" she said, loud enough for all around to hear. "Did you think, then," she added, scornfully, "that I'd remain at your bidding?"

"I think so still," he answered.

With a quick laugh, she drew her arm from the detaining hand laid upon it, and walked from the room.

"It is time to lock the door," said the master, looking quietly about on the excited faces near; "so, good-afternoon."

"What a shame for her to behave so!" said the girls. "I wouldn't."

"How can he expect her to do as he says?" said the boys. "I'd know better."

That evening, Paul paced moodily up and down the moonlit garden.

"Well," he was thinking, "she or I must leave the school, that's clear. She will never give up after this. I wish I had not carried the matter so far, and yet how could I do otherwise? She is pretty—very pretty, but so willful. She had half a mind to obey me to-day. Poor child! how white she was! I wish—what was that?"

He paused suddenly and listened—startled by a low sound near—a stifled sobbing. He looked hastily around. On a bench under an old apple-tree near, he saw a white figure lying. Dropping the cigar he had been smoking, he moved softly forward.

There on the bench Fleda was lying, her head pillowed on her arms. Sob after sob shook her small figure pitifully; her long braids of hair had become partly unfastened, and fell to the ground at Paul's feet.

Was this the same girl who had defied him that morning, and who had appeared so gayly indifferent through the afternoon and evening? What sudden grief was this? Paul hesitated an instant, then said gently:

"Miss Willis!"

She started up with a low cry, and would have fled, but he caught her hand and held it firmly, saying:

"Stay just a moment, I beseech you. I have endeavored to find an opportunity to speak with you alone. Won't you grant me a few moments now?"

"Oh! No! No!" she cried, struggling to free her hand. "I cannot—indeed, indeed, I cannot! Pray, pray let me go."

"In one moment," he returned, drawing her down beside him upon the bench. "But I wish you, first, if you can, to forget your dislike of me, and answer two or three simple questions. Will you do so?"

She nodded, and he continued, first releasing the little cold hand:

"When I entered on my duties here, I did so with the wish of gaining my pupils' liking and respect. I had no desire to be arbitrary, and I particularly wished the hours spent in school to be pleasant to all. Do you believe this?"

Somewhat to his surprise, she bowed again.

"From the very first," he went on, steadily, "I saw that I had been unfortunate enough to incur your dislike. I trust you will believe me when I say that I endeavored to be as kind, and overlook as many faults, as was at all consistent with my duty. But, Miss Willis, I did not feel that I could allow the same act of disobedience to pass unnoticed day after day. I think, if you will look at the matter quietly, and putting yourself in my place, you will see the impossibility of it. I am very sorry for what has occurred—more sorry than I can express. There are but two ways this very unfortunate matter can be arranged. Aside from the disobedience," he continued, in a lower tone, "you spoke to me, before the other scholars, this morning, as no pupil should speak to a teacher."

From the first, Fleda had been sitting perfectly motionless: but now she buried her face in her hands, and Rutledge saw she was crying again. As she moved, her long hair was thrown against his arm: he touched it caressingly once or twice as he went on speaking in the same grave manner:

"Of course, either you or I must leave the school."

Fleda started slightly.

"The only way that could be avoided would be for you to make a public apology, and then remain after school, as I desired."

He expected an outbreak of some kind here; but Fleda did not speak.

"I know, of course, you would refuse to do this. If you come to school and still refuse to submit, there would be but one way left open to me—to expel you. You see this?" gently.

There was no answer.

"What I beg of you to do is to remain away for a short time. I will send in my resignation at once; so, in a little while, I would be gone. I trust you will do this, Miss Willis," very earnestly. "Believe me, it is the only way there is left. You'll promise me—will you not?"

He was silent. The moon shone directly down on the little white figure beside him; her long hair still touched his hand. A slight breeze was stirring, and some yellow leaves from the old apple-tree floated down and settled on Fleda's dress and bowed head.

"Will you not?" he repeated, still very gently.

Her hands dropped, and she raised her tear-stained face. The kind expression in the handsome eyes regarding her was almost more than she could bear. Rising hurriedly, she exclaimed:

"I cannot! I cannot! Wait—wait till to-morrow; I will tell you then." And, the next moment, Mr. Rutledge was alone.

The moon had run her course, when he rose with a slight shiver, caused by sitting so long in the night air. A small dark object lay on the path before him. Raising it, he looked at it in the starlight: only a faded cluster of scarlet geranium, not even sweet; but, for all that, Paul lifted it to his lips, and then placed it carefully in an inner pocket, as if it were the greatest treasure on earth.

As he entered the school-room, the next morning, it was with difficulty he suppressed a start of surprise: for the first person that met his astonished gaze was Fleda, seated quietly at her desk, bending over a book.

"Ah, well," thought the poor fellow, bitterly, "I might have known what to expect. Does she come here to humiliate me, I wonder, knowing her power and that I could not demand an apology or send her home in disgrace? I thought she would have remained away at my request—fool that I was!"

He rang the bell and took his seat, too unhappy and preoccupied to notice the air of suppressed excitement that prevailed.

The scholars wondered: What would the master say? What would he do? But, if they wished for a scene, disappointment awaited them—the morning exercises commenced as usual.

When the first class, to which Fleda belonged, was called, she did not move. The recitation was almost over, when Paul—who was aware of the girl's slightest motion—observed that, after for an instant dropping her face in her hands, she rose. Paul hoped that she had concluded to comply with his request, even at this late hour, and that she would leave the room; but

she came forward and stood in the sight of the whole school.

"Mr. Rutledge," she said, in a soft clear voice, "I have something I wish to say, if you will allow me."

Paul bowed. What could be coming? Some new insolence? Or could it be— A sudden hope sent a thrill to his heart and the color to his cheeks.

"Certainly, Miss Willis," he said.

She was silent for a moment, and her face grew so white Paul feared she would fall, and half started forward to support her before he thought, and checked the impulse. She steadied herself by putting one little hand upon his desk, then spoke rapidly:

"I was very disobedient and impertinent to you, yesterday and many times before. I am sorry now, and wish to know—to know if you'll forgive me and allow me to remain after school to-day, in the place of yesterday."

Her voice faltered toward the close; but she steadied it again and raised her eyes to Paul's face.

She was startled by the strange brilliant light in the eyes that met hers. For a moment, she stood bewildered; then a sudden burning flush dyed her cheeks, and her lids fell.

With an effort, Paul gathered his wits together.

"You are pardoned, Miss Willis," he said, "and may remain after school this afternoon. Now will you kindly take your place in class?"

School was over, and every scholar but Fleda gone. She sat at her desk, one hand shading her eyes.

Paul closed the door, hesitated a moment, then crossed the room and paused beside Fleda. Her head drooped still lower. For a minute, there was silence, then Paul said earnestly:

"Words are powerless to express my gratitude, Miss—Fleda; still I must thank you."

A quiver passed over the half-averted face.

"Do not cry!" Paul exclaimed, imploringly.

"I have caused you so many tears. But don't be troubled, for this generosity on your part shall not be the means of causing you the prolonged annoyance of being compelled to meet me every day through the long winter.

No! believe me, I am not so ungenerous; but, whereas before I would have gone feeling distressed and humiliated, I now go feeling—feeling—well, not sorry that I have been here, if only for so short a time. And," he continued, lower, "I will always carry the remembrance of your kindness with me wherever I may be."

"But you said you forgave me," said Fleda, raising her head, but not her eyes. "Was that not true, then?"

"Assuredly!" he returned, flushing. "Can you doubt it?"

"But still you go?"

Her voice was so low, he was obliged to bend nearer to catch the words.

Now he seated himself on a chair near, the better to see her lowered face.

"Miss Willis," he said, "you must understand that I am going solely for your sake; for my own, I could not remain too long. As the only thing I can do for you is to leave, I have determined to do so."

She laid her little hand on his.

"I will be so good—if you will stay," she said.

His fingers closed over hers. "Am I to understand—it cannot be that it is your pleasure to have me here?"

There was no answer.

"Fleda! look at me."

Slowly the long lashes were raised; and—well, Paul Rutledge did not leave Woodville for many months. When he did take his departure, one beautiful June evening, he was not alone.

As the carriage which bore him and his bonny bride to the station passed the academy, Rutledge looked at Fleda with eyes full of mischief, and a peculiar indrawing of the lips.

"Paul!" she exclaimed, reproachfully, "you are thinking about that time! I wish the old school-house could be annihilated; it will always remind you—" she paused.

Paul laughed as he drew her more closely to him.

"Yes, my darling," he said, "it will always remind me of the time when I fell so desperately in love with my most troublesome pupil."

## THE BITTER CUP.

Thou canst not change one little drop  
That heaven hath mixed for thee;  
However bitter be the cup,

It may thy healing be;  
And in its dregs the sweetest hope  
Thy soul at last may see.

# THE MURDER IN LAFAYETTE PLACE. A STORY OF OLD NEW YORK.

BY EDGAR FAWCETT, AUTHOR OF "AN AMBITIOUS WOMAN," "THE HOUSE AT HIGH BRIDGE," "TINKLING CYMBALS," "A GENTLEMAN OF LEISURE," "RUTHERFORD," ETC.

## CHAPTER I.



EARS—many and long, bringing many and radical changes—have passed over New York since a certain frightful murder caused one shudder of horror to sweep through the whole provincial little city,

from South Ferry up into what we now call lower Fifth Avenue, and from Greenwich Village to where Grand Street strikes upon the present crowded wharfage of the East River.

Long afterward, it was called "the Averyl murder," though by degrees all memory of it died away, and the mystery which enfolded it not only ceased to pique curiosity, but to concern intelligence as well. It had occurred in Lafayette Place, then a comparatively new quarter of the metropolis.

For a good while, the truth regarding the murder was never more than indefinitely surmised, and, when at last this truth had become nearly established as a certainty, the people most interested in discovering it had slipped those fleshly leashes which are somehow responsible alike for our excitement and our indifference.

A number of arrests had been made in the past—chiefly of servants. No new ones were made now. The law had been active, assertive, penetrative, but its position was now one of complete nullity. If it had desired either to investigate or to arraign, the absence of both plaintiff and defendant was a most cogent reason for its apathy.

The murder had been done. Lafayette Place, the scene of its doing, changed from an up-town semi-rural district into a handsome though curtailed boulevard—wider, if shorter, than many in Paris. People forgot it all. People are always so prone to forget everything, pleasant or troublous, favorable or calamitous. The city grew. Private carriages began to roll through streets that had never seen a liveried footman. New York politics lost their pristine simplicity, and became sadly, not to say odiously, compli-

cated. Fortunes of citizens swelled in bulk till ten thousand dollars to-day were what fifty dollars had been yesterday, judged by the present estimate of social requirement.

It had been a shocking murder, of course. But who remembered it? Who had time to remember it? There had been so many shocking murders since then.

But the house in which it happened still stands. It seems unpretentious and meagre enough nowadays; it has been turned into a boarding-house, as almost every other building in Lafayette Place has been so turned.

The facts of the case have drifted down to their present narrator in a peculiar way. But he is prepared to vouch for their truth most staunchly, except where it should be a question of challenging him with respect to the authenticity of certain alleged conversations and further similar details.

There are embellishments, if you please; but, like the filigrees wrought of iron, they have their qualities of distinct permanence. The annalist will not concede even their falsity; perhaps he possesses data of too strong a substantiality to assume any attitude so comparatively feeble.

The murder, in its time, amazed and distressed thousands. Lady Hubert Averyl had been found, one morning, in her gaslit drawing-room, stabbed to the heart with an Oriental dagger, which after-testimony made sure to have rested on one of her drawing-room tables for months past.

She was quite dead when her servants discovered her, and had probably been so for several hours.

A woman of English title was a rare enough member of early New York society; but Lady Hubert Averyl's claim to the dignity was thoroughly well founded. She had come to these shores about six months previous, with letters and endorsements wholly unimpeachable. The most select Knickerbockers had called upon her. There was no shadow of doubt regarding the person she represented herself to be. She had exhibited a somewhat ostentatious tendency, it was true; but this the simple-minded residents of old Dutch blood easily pardoned. Her credentials were irreproachable.

The new English Minister, during a brief stay in New York, on his way to Washington, had paid his respects to her. There could be no question as to her right of bearing the title she assumed.

Her late husband had been Lord Hubert Averyl, third or fourth son of the Duke of Bournemouth. Her own origin may have been a trifle obscure; the English Minister could not, so to speak, exactly lay his hand upon her pedigree. But he avowed, rather confidently, that it was thoroughly nice and proper. She had been a Warwickshire girl of good family—or was it Leicestershire? He could not just recall. And it would be so rude to ask Lady Hubert, point-blank, she having come to these foreign shores with such admirable vouchers.

Everybody who was anybody went to see her. Not to go had become a culpable omission among the prim-mannered and conservative Manhattans, Amsterdams, and Van Twillers of that era.

"We haven't paid our respects yet," said Emily Provost to her husband, one morning, at breakfast.

"No," answered Bleeker Provost, in his drawling and rather foreign way. "We must go there, I suppose, Emily; mustn't we?"

Mrs. Provost thought that this answer meant nothing. She always thought that no piece of instruction on her husband's part meant anything unless he put it in the shape of a quiet command. She had been a Miss Vanderveer, and had brought her autocratic spouse a fortune then esteemed enormous—two hundred thousand dollars and more.

Bleeker Provost, though of stainless lineage, had not been just the sort of person whom her guardians—Emily was an orphan at the time of her marriage—had wished her to wed. Bleeker had been abroad several times, and bore a rather unsavory reputation. He was past early youth when Emily Vanderveer had met him. It was roundly declared that the marriage had been one of policy on Bleeker's part, and one of silly infatuation on that of the heiress.

But Emily, her friends affirmed, had rapidly cooled in her ardor of attachment.

They lived, the husband and wife, in a smart new mansion not far from where Great Jones Street gave upon Lafayette Place. Bleeker, in his married life, had deserted few of the dainty elegancies which had marked him as a bachelor. It must be added that he had not deserted pursuits and tendencies which the gentlest charity must have called immoral rather than merely frivolous. He was indeed a man with whom no one thought of connecting the acute conscien-

tious twinge, though everybody appeared instinctively to acquit him of any really gross misdemeanor. He detested New York, and openly expressed his keen sympathies with Parisian life. The repose and conventionalism of his native city bored him beyond expression.

He was extremely handsome, possessing large dark eyes, set in a face of delicately clear complexion, that an airy pointed blonde beard and a slight mustache of even lighter shade rendered picturesque, not to say poetic. His figure was almost as lissome and flexible as a girl's, but manly withal, and of a grace beyond cavil. It had transpired somewhat widely that his wife did not share his French sympathies, and that her reluctance to live in Europe had sown the first post-nuptial seeds of discord between the pair.

But this declaration may have been as untrue as any which gossip, that maker of spurious coinage, turns out from her facile and often spiteful mint. It was certain that matters had so arranged themselves, between Bleeker Provost and his wife, as to create a languidly polite dictation on one side, and a sad, wearied, disappointed acquiescence on the other.

Emily Provost had never been a beauty; but her pale sweet face, with its blue trustful eyes and the sensitive curl of the lips, had undergone a marring change in the past year or two. It was still a face that held winning outlines and tints, but, if you studied it at all well, you saw that life had somehow told upon it, and that the imprint left there, however elusive and undefinable, was distinctly one of both irony and sorrow.

It happened that New-Year Day was now near at hand, and, while Bleeker Provost made out his list of ceremonial visits, he placed the name of Lady Hubert Averyl decidedly near the top.

"I shall drop in on her ladyship, of course," he told his wife. "She has sent us cards to her great ball on the fifteenth, and this is a rather marked courtesy, considering that we have not yet acknowledged her appearance in Lafayette Place."

"They say she is charming," replied Mrs. Provost. "Cousin Sarah Schuyler called on her, the other day, and went away in raptures."

Bleeker stroked his handsome yellow beard with one white hand.

"Did Cousin Sarah Schuyler," he asked, tranquilly, "discover why the deuce she had come here to live?"

"No," his wife replied. "But I suppose, after all, she has a right to like America."

"Oh, yes. Still, there are usually reasons

for such a preference on the part of any English-woman with a position like hers."

"Reasons?" murmured Mrs. Provost. "Oh, I see," she went on, glancing swiftly for an instant into her husband's face: "you mean that she may have had some trouble in her own country—some experience of a distressing sort—some—"

"I don't mean anything half so dreadful as that, I assure you," Bleecker interrupted, with one of his brief laughs: that she who heard it had of late grown to think so suggestively cold: "I merely mean Emily, that Lady Hubert must be somewhat of a cynic regarding the attractions of European life, to exchange them for the dullness of a big, stupid, overgrown village like New York. But I shall drop in upon her when New-Year Day comes, and make my own observations. I like her apparent desire to wake up this sleepy town of ours. She evidently means to lead society here—such as it is."

#### CHAPTER II.

NEW-YEAR DAY dawned clear and crisply cold. Bleecker Provost made his calls on foot, as was then the custom. He thought it abominable that he should be obliged to trudge about, instead of driving. But no one kept a private carriage in those times. To do so would have been held horribly pretentious. Lady Hubert Averyl had her private carriage; but then she was an Englishwoman of pronounced caste, and so permissibly indulged herself in the maintenance of national customs.

Great indeed was the contrast between New-Year Day of that epoch and the New-Year Day of now. Not to pay visits was then, for a New York gentleman, excusable on grounds of illness alone.

Bleecker Provost struck westward, into Varick Place, Sullivan Street, St. John's Park, and many similar localities. He met, in the drawing-rooms of houses among these patrician districts, ladies prepared to receive him with a hospitality finely substantialized in big iced plinths of plum-cake and pound-cake, tureens of pickled oysters, decanters of rich old Madeira. Everywhere, he had to touch his lips—if nothing more—to a glass of wine, and wish "the compliments of the season." In many of the drawing-rooms that he entered, a little boy or girl had a written list of the "callers" for that day, to which his own name was appended with glad vivacity. He hated the whole compulsory custom. Indeed, there was a vigor and spontaneity about some of the ladies' welcomes that, with an inward sneer, he pronounced "American" in the most vulgar sense

of the word—and it was a word which he thought capable of expressing, at a pinch, considerable hard vulgarity.

Still, he was by many degrees too clever to let a suspicion of his ennui escape among his hostesses. Bleecker invariably cultivated civility; he had always thought it such dull impolicy not to do so. The muscles of his lips easily disposed themselves into what we call a smile, and they were muscles that had no compromising relations with the heart lying somewhere below them.

But, however much his salutations of the Beekmans, the Amsterdams, the Ten Eycks, or the Van Dams may have bored him, this morning, he had reserved the dwelling of Lady Hubert Averyl for his last call, and he anticipated from this the pleasure which gratified curiosity will bestow, even if no keener enjoyment should await him.

Lady Hubert's ball promised to be a startlingly novel event. It was possible that she meant to lead in a brilliantly festal way that somewhat sluggish community termed "New York society." There were a good many people whom Bleecker knew who would agree to be pricked into real social activity by any such stimulator as a Lady Hubert Averyl. "I hope she is pretty and winning," he thought, as he paused before her stoop in Lafayette Place.

The hour was almost that of twilight. The day had been damp and slushy underfoot, with a chill swift air blowing up from the Battery, and that humid blue heaven overhead which so often accompanies the perilous mildness of our New York thaws. Bleecker had done his duty, and that was never a task for him of any strongly agreeable results. He wanted, just now, a little real diversion, and he expected it as he ascended, with much placid and resolute confidence, the steps of the last house in which he was to appear as a visitor.

Lafayette Place was at this period a sparsely settled quarter. Fifty years back from now, it was called "out in the 'country,'" by New Yorkers. The granite row of columned houses, erected in 1836, and then named La Grange Terrace, gave it an air of distinction and picturesqueness now. It was very far from being the rather common Vauxhall Garden, which it had formerly been, with walks among trees, and incidents of statue or bust, and small tables for the disposition of ice-cream plates and lemonade-glasses, and a husky incompetent orchestra, and an equestrian figure of Washington, no doubt carved as execrably as all such works of transatlantic art were then carved. It had become a rather majestic boulevard, or



the beginning of one. The Astors had not yet built in it their beautiful library, though the Dutch Reformed Church, with heavy Corinthian pillars and a roof copied in gray miniature after that of the Parthenon, loomed from one of its corners. The house which Lady Hubert had taken was a large brick structure, not very far from Great Jones Street, and by no means suggestive of the rich decorations which Bleecker soon found its interior to contain.

They surprised him, these decorations, as he cast his look from carpet to furniture and thence to the walls that surrounded both. They were full of an Eastern color, glow, and significance. He had seen such things done in Parisian abodes, and perhaps done much better. But the rugs, the tapestries, the ornaments told of a sure taste, nevertheless, and of a proprietary fund which must be the product of Oriental travel.

He was glad that the decorous footman had told him Lady Hubert "would see Mr. Provost in a few minutes." If she had received him on his entrance into these bright, ornate, and unanticipated chambers, he would probably have found meagre chance to inspect the smart encompassments among which she dwelt. As it was, her ladyship was no doubt dining. It was so delightful to think of anyone dining late in New York, and not hugging that odious habit of two o'clock dinner, which he had long ago taught his wife to alter.

Lady Hubert had doubtless imagined that all her New-Year calls were ended. And this was precisely a consummation which Bleecker held devoutly to be hoped. He wanted to meet her with no molesting sociality on the part of fellow-callers. Of course, she had heard of him. Of course, she would be glad to receive him. He so trusted that she would be nice and engaging, as he had been told that she was! But he must judge for himself. How could one trust old Ogden Stuyvesant, who was tiresomely bourgeois, or Rensselaer Van Cortlandt, who had shown his bad taste, ages ago, by marrying that limp graceless woman, his present wife, merely because she was his own first-cousin, and true Dutch-blooded Van Cortlandt herself?

Bleecker Provost waited in a good deal of pleasant suspense for the coming of Lady Hubert Averyl. And when, presently, the heavy curtains at the end of the second drawing-room were parted, and a tall gliding feminine shape advanced toward him, he rose with a little flush of color in his handsome face, and with something which he would have been loth to admit as a quicker pulsation of the heart.

But soon the new color died quite out of his cheeks, though, perhaps, his heart had already begun to beat much more rapidly.

### CHAPTER III.

"MARTHA!" he exclaimed, as the lady drew toward him. He could have taken her hand, but he did not do so. He simply sank back on the sofa from which he had risen, with pale face and staring eyes.

"Oh, yes, Martha, if you please," said Lady Hubert Averyl. Her voice was very musical and composed. Her small head, crowning its white curve of throat, suited her tall stature. She was a woman with a face that reminded you somehow of a lily. She was not fair, but her features were all exquisite and delicate, though the two large burning brown eyes that were set under her night-like glosses of heavy banded hair seemed delightfully unsuited to the refined chiseling of the face itself. The latter was incarnate tranquillity and sweetness; but those brown luminous eyes looked as if they could harbor no small fund of emphatic unreserved passion.

She seated herself at Bleecker Provost's side. She witnessed his dire agitation with a faultless serenity. "Are you so surprised?" she murmured.

"Surprised?" he faltered, gasping the word. "My God! I never dreamed of this!"

Lady Hubert smiled. It was a smile of untold irony. "You did not expect to find," she said, as if measuring each word, "that the woman whom you betrayed by a false marriage, seven years ago, could possibly present herself before you as the widow of an English duke's son—as, in brief, Lady Hubert Averyl."

"No, no," murmured Bleecker, spiritlessly and distractedly.

"But it is true," pursued his companion, her calm voice never changing from its even monotone. "I am glad that you chose this hour for your New-Year call, Mr. Provost. It affords me a so much more clear and wholly desired opportunity. Opportunity, I mean, for explaining just why you see me here now—wondrously altered, as I think you will admit, from the Martha Agnew your villainy tried to ruin."

"Wondrously," he said, staring at the floor.

"It's a strange story," she went on. "And yet many stranger ones than mine could no doubt be told. Now that I look back and recollect how I woke up one morning in Philadelphia, and learned not only of your desertion, but of your frightful treachery, I cannot

understand by what exercise of power I was able to go on living at all. But I did go on living. And yet I was almost delirious when at last I got back to the old house in Bloomingdale, where I was born."

Provost started up, but, at an imperious gesture of her hand, reseated himself in silence, while she continued in the same slow even tone:

"My poor Aunt Thyrza said that I seemed to rave as I crouched at her feet, stared wildly up into her face, and told her all. You had married or pretended to marry me under a false name, but, although you trusted to the concealing measures of flight alone, I had fondly stolen a little miniature of you during our ghastly mockery of a honeymoon, and thus I was enabled to discover your name and exact position afterward, through the assistance of detectives. I learned that Arthur Hollis was not your name, and that Bleecker Provost was. I acquainted myself with every important occurrence of your life. Aunt Thyrza, deeply incensed against you as she was, made me promise that I would refrain from exposing your crime."

Again he made a movement, again an imperious gesture stopped him.

"Pride and love equally swayed her in this motive. I respected her impulse; it was little enough for me to do, after leaving her so ungratefully in the past, and consenting to what I had believed a clandestine wedding-ceremony with you. The falsehood you had told me about your tyrannical father having desired you to marry a certain woman whom you abhorred, giving this fact as an excuse for the secrecy of our own marriage, almost maddened me with contempt and scorn when I recalled it. For months, while I brooded there at home upon the horror of it all, I felt capable of ruining myself before the eyes of society, simply that I might deal upon you the vengeance and punishment you so richly merited."

He tried, as he had done several times, to support her gaze, but again his eyes sank beneath hers.

"It seems to me that I would have regarded your outrage with less bitterness if I had been more humbly born than I was—if we Agnews had not been a race of gentlefolk—if I myself had not in the beginning stooped from becoming dignity in speaking to you or in permitting you to address me, when I had first met you near the hotel at which you had transiently stalled your horses during one of your Bloomingdale drives. The hideous insult rankled more because I had come of so honorable and blameless a family."

She paused here, for a moment, and Bleecker now lifted his eyes from the floor, saying in tones that were hoarse and wretchedly broken: "For God's sake, don't go on tormenting me like this. You've got everything in your own hands now, of course. You could speak all night, I suppose, and force me to listen. I grant that I behaved like the meanest of scoundrels. You mustn't think I haven't suffered for it, though. I have, and horribly. I—"

"Pshaw!" she broke in, with a cool fleeting laugh, while her manner remained as decorous and placid as if she had been reproving him for some trivial lapse of etiquette. "You know very well that you are incapable of a conscience-stab. You are a good deal afraid of me just now, but that is all. You can feel fear; the most depraved natures are assailable in that way. Well, I will curtail my narration, since it distresses you. I will state how I became Lady Hubert Avery."

She managed to throw into these latter words a sarcasm whose poignancy caused Bleecker to start and bite his almost bloodless lips. His agitation and shame were alike pitiable. If she had any satisfaction in seeing him tortured, she must have keenly enjoyed his present disarray. But she gave no such sign. Her voice, while she continued, was frigid and passionless as though he had been her legal adviser, and she discussing with him this or that mortgage, investment, or sale of real estate.

"I had Aunt Thyrza's affairs to superintend. About six months later, she was stricken with paralysis, and rendered very weak from the attack. It was my misfortune that induced her illness, preying upon her mind relentlessly. I need not tell you that I was her only near relation. You were very well aware that I had lived with her from my childhood, as her sole companion, in the old Bloomingdale house. Her property was not large; you knew that. If you had thought me an heiress, you would not have betrayed me so infamously—our marriage would not have been a sham one. Still, small as they were, my aunt's possessions needed my intelligent survey. For that reason, I had to consult certain lawyers in New York; and, one day, while I was seated in the office of these gentlemen, I met Lord Hubert Avery."

#### CHAPTER IV.

HER listener's face showed that, through all his selfish agitation, her story had a keen interest for him. She saw this, and paused for an instant with an amused smile.

"He had come to New York, on his way

toward the West," she continued. "He was going to shoot buffaloes there; he was a passionate sportsman. I did not know that he was the son of the Duke of Bournemouth when he asked to be presented to me. They introduced him as 'Mr. Averyl, from England.' He was not more than thirty years old, bluff, rather handsome, and almost awkwardly bashful. He hated to have his rank transpire in this country—it bored him to be called 'my lord' in a republic. Lord Hubert—whom, for several weeks afterward, I knew simply as 'Mr. Averyl'—asked permission to visit me, off in the country at Bloomingdale; I granted his request. He came on several successive days. Just at this time, Aunt Thyrsa grew worse. One afternoon, when I was wrung with the probability of her approaching death, Lord Hubert came and told me that he was not merely Mr. Averyl. That same afternoon, he asked me to be his wife. I immediately suspected him of being an impostor. You had taught me the meaning of suspicion—you can congratulate yourself on having rendered me that notable service."

"Oh!" he ejaculated, fairly writhing under the lash of her sarcasm; but she went on:

"I said to myself: 'If he is Lord Hubert Averyl, I will marry him.' The answer I gave him was one of demur. The next day, I took a trip to New York, visited my lawyers, and made certain that he had not lied to me. Meanwhile, Aunt Thyrsa grew worse. If she died, I would be left absolutely alone. But I was honest with Lord Hubert. You may not understand this; I am very certain that you could not possibly understand it, either in the woman whom you had made your innocent victim or in any other woman on earth. But I was honest, nevertheless. The next time that Lord Hubert came to me for his answer, I spoke out the truth to him, severely and determinedly."

"You told him?" Provost exclaimed.

"Oh, I did not confide your name, though with flushed cheeks and clenched hands he presently beseeched me to do so. I thought his rage would perhaps end in a civil and permanent farewell; but it ended in nothing of the sort—Lord Hubert was hopelessly, infatuatedly enamored of me. Three days later, I became his wife. The next evening, Aunt Thyrsa quietly breathed her last.

"I went to England with him. I was at once received by all his friends and kindred with the best sort of favor. Then, one day, three years ago, he broke his neck in a fox-hunt across-country. The accident has left me exceedingly rich. My position in England is faultless."

"Yet—you have come back to—to America," he stammered, white-faced and hoarse of voice, "with the purpose of—of denouncing me. Is not this true?"

She smiled with amusement and satire, as she watched his torturing perturbation.

"I never thought you a fool," she said. "I have thought very hard things of you—but never that."

"You mean?" he queried, stepping back from her, while his gaze seemed now to cling, against his will, to her beautiful self-possessed face.

"I mean," she said, "that I have a position which I cannot afford to sully."

Just then, the same footman who had admitted Bleeker brought in a card. Soon afterward, a gentleman entered the room and bowed with great gallantry to Lady Hubert, stooping and kissing her hand before his elaborate salutation was ended. Bleeker, always quick in his observations, had silently pronounced the gentleman a foreigner, even before his hostess, leaning toward him with a suave smile, had said:

"Let me present Mr. Bleeker Provost—the Prince Monti."

For some little while after Lady Hubert had presented him to the Prince Monti, he found himself talking on commonplace themes, asking and answering questions, showing his usual suavity and propriety of deportment. And yet, when he had somehow managed to get away and to strike his feet on the pavements out-of-doors, he could scarcely recall either a word that he had spoken or a word that had been spoken to him. He had never believed Martha Agnew to be dead; but he had supposed her perhaps prosperously and decently married to some sort of fellow whom he would never run against in the whole future course of his life.

As for the dastardly and despicable act which he had committed, he had long ago decided that it was thoroughly hideous. But his light shallow nature was incapable of that depth and scope of remorse which, to a man less flippant and superficial, would have brought guilty suffering.

"She will not betray me," he suddenly assured himself, amid his own mental turmoil, as he walked along. "It's for no purpose such as that, her return here. I am perfectly safe."

His reflections paused there. He had hidden, rather successfully, for years, the real meanness and paltriness of his character from others. Perhaps he shrank, just then, from a similar hypocrisy, where it concerned the something he might have termed his own manhood.

[TO BE CONCLUDED.]